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Draft recommendations on education

I. Introduction

1. The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, at its second session, recalls the Millennium Development Goal to "Achieve universal primary education", and reiterates its support, with a focus on indigenous women and girls. In accordance with the provision contained in the relevant international instruments, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, International Labour Organization Convention 169 and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention against Discrimination in Education, some Governments have in recent years, taking into account their specific situations, formulated policies and programmes to safeguard indigenous peoples' equal rights to education, and have adopted positive measures to address indigenous education issues. These should be promoted as good practices throughout the United Nations system and broadly to all Member States. Furthermore, to achieve equitable educational outcomes for indigenous peoples, Governments should adopt special measures (UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education).

2. The Forum recognizes that:

(a) Education can be an effective means to protect the cultural traditions of indigenous peoples;

(b) Education is a basic human right for indigenous peoples;

(c) Education is a prerequisite for the realization of other human rights;

(d) Education is an effective means leading to equality, freedom and quality of life;

(e) Education, when it is culturally appropriate, promotes mother tongue learning and includes indigenous knowledge in the curriculum, can help defend against the negative impacts of cultural globalization;

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(f) Education is a crucial right for indigenous women and girls;

(g) Education principles must ensure non-discrimination (ethnicity, sex or age);

(h) The mother tongue is the foundation for all learning;

(i) Education should include sport and physical activities and physical education.

3. The Forum makes the recommendations set out below to United Nations Member States (sect. II), the United Nations system (sect. III) and indigenous peoples organizations (sect. IV).

II. Member States

4. Member States should consider the adoption and full implementation of comprehensive national indigenous education policies based on the following goals:

Participation

(a) Establishing effective arrangements for the participation of indigenous parents and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of education services for their children, young people and other community members;

(b) Increasing the number of indigenous people employed as educational administrators, teachers, coaches, officials, curriculum advisers, teacher's assistants, home-school liaison officers and other education workers, including community members engaged in teaching indigenous culture, history and contemporary society, and indigenous languages;

(c) Developing arrangements for the provision of independent advice from indigenous communities regarding educational decisions at all levels;

(d) Achieving the participation of indigenous children, young people and adults in education for a period similar to that of other students;

Access

(e) Ensuring that indigenous children, young people and adults have access to all levels of education (including adult education) on a basis comparable to that available to other citizens;

Attainment

(f) Enabling indigenous students to attain skills and graduation rates up to the same standard as other students throughout the compulsory and non-compulsory schooling years;

(g) Developing teaching forms and curricula based on mother tongue (additive learning) in primary and secondary education (should be mandatory in order to achieve goal (f) above);

(h) Developing curricula for both primary and secondary education which reflect the insights and usefulness of indigenous knowledge systems and are sensitive to indigenous values. Curricula should:

(i) Incorporate indigenous histories, traditional knowledge and spiritual values;

(ii) Integrate indigenous oral traditions, myths and writings, acknowledging these as unique parts of world heritage;

Indigenous languages, proficiency in the national language, literacy and numeracy

(i) Developing programmes based on the child's mother tongue (first language) as a foundation for learning and aiming at the maintenance and continued use of indigenous languages;

(j) Enabling the attainment of proficiency in the commonly used national language and at least one international language, and numeracy competencies by all indigenous students, including indigenous adults, giving particular attention to indigenous women based on the framework of the United Nations Decade of Literacy;

Capacity-building

(k) Providing community education services which will enable indigenous peoples to develop the skills to manage the development of their communities;

(l) Providing education and training services to develop the skills of indigenous people to participate in educational decision-making;

Appreciation, understanding and respect for indigenous cultures

(m) Enabling all students, both indigenous and non-indigenous, at all levels of education, to have an appreciation and understanding of and respect for traditional and contemporary indigenous histories, cultures and identities;

Anti-racism strategies

(n) Promoting anti-racism education, including strategies to empower young people to deal with racism in the compulsory schooling curriculum;

Cultural, social and economic development in education

(o) Indigenous peoples should be resourced and supported to establish their own education systems, including schools, should they so choose. Also, traditional indigenous education and its structures should be respected and supported;

Education for indigenous peoples in custody or detention

(p) Given the overrepresentation of indigenous youth and adults in detention, the Forum urges States to consider culturally relevant and appropriate education for indigenous peoples in detention centres;

(q) The Permanent Forum asks that education plans, programmes and policies be implemented especially for indigenous girls, boys and women.

III. United Nations system

5. The Forum recommends that the United Nations system consider the following recommendations:

(a) The United Nations system should fully explore the protection, use and promotion of indigenous (including traditional) knowledge and ensure synergies across the relevant bodies currently investigating the issues (specifically the World Intellectual Property Organization, UNESCO, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the World Health Organization, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and others) and furthermore should invite the Forum to participate;

(b) UNESCO should continue to investigate indigenous pedagogy and its application to indigenous education in collaboration with the Special Rapporteur on the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples and the Forum and other relevant bodies. The study should include the use of such strategies as boarding schools and both their negative and positive effects. To assist with this investigation into indigenous education, UNESCO is urged to facilitate regional conferences and a global forum on indigenous education to identify both barriers to educational equity and good practice;

(c) The Forum calls upon Governments and UNESCO to give more attention (by increasing their budgets) to developing quality indigenous education policies (with the participation of indigenous peoples) to achieve the Dakar objectives. "Education for all" is one of the fundamental objectives of the World Education Forum that should be achieved by 2015;

(d) The Forum encourages the United Nations Children's Fund, UNESCO and other agencies to continue to support, in cooperation with indigenous peoples, intercultural and bilingual education programmes and to promote in particular the right of education for girls;

(e) The Forum should work with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) to coordinate training for indigenous peoples within the United Nations system;

(f) UNESCO is requested to facilitate a world indigenous education conference, with appropriate United Nations partners (the Forum, UNESCO, UNITAR etc.), Member States and indigenous peoples. Furthermore, UNESCO should invite indigenous peoples and the Forum to participate in United Nations activities in the field of education. UNESCO has recently completed and distributed a publication on best practices for indigenous peoples education and this should be promoted throughout the international community;

(g) UNICEF advocates bilingual and cross-cultural education for indigenous peoples and conducts schools for girls and women's literacy programmes in Latin America, and this initiative should be further encouraged and expanded;

(h) The Forum recommends that relevant agencies and Governments, on a regional basis, should provide technical services and the political and moral support needed for the creation, recognition and functioning of future international indigenous universities;

(i) Taking into account the importance of UNESCO national commissions, the Forum recommends that the Economic and Social Council and Governments facilitate the participation of indigenous peoples in the regional commissions with the incorporation of indigenous representation;

(j) The Forum, to underscore the crucial role of language skills to sustainable development and in celebration of the United Nations Year on Education for Sustainable Development (2005), recommends that the secretariat of the Forum, together with the United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF and UNESCO, explore the possibility of organizing a regional workshop in Asia or Africa on the theme "Indigenous children and language education", to discuss policies, programmes and practical experiences with bilingual education to strengthen additive learning through the use of mother tongue and the "indigenization" of curricula in formal schooling, among members of the Forum, United Nations agencies, Governments (especially departments of education), indigenous and tribal representatives and indigenous education experts.

IV. Indigenous peoples organizations

6. Recognizing that States cannot address indigenous education issues alone or in isolation, indigenous representatives and organizations of indigenous peoples should prepare to engage with Governments to facilitate the indigenous education goals of participation, access, attainment, indigenous languages, proficiency in the national language and at least one international language and numeracy, capacity-building, appreciation, understanding and respect for indigenous cultures, and anti-racism strategies.

7. The Forum welcomes the establishment of an indigenous education caucus and looks forward to working with them to promote mutual indigenous education goals, and urges indigenous educators to become actively involved in this useful structure.

8. The Forum reiterates the recommendations on the dissemination of information on indigenous issues, and invites indigenous peoples organizations, through the indigenous education caucus, to foster new forms and ways to further education and dissemination of information concerning the Forum to indigenous peoples communities and organizations, using radio programmes, publications and other appropriate cultural and educational media. The Forum recommends that the funds, programmes and organizations of the United Nations system assign appropriate resources and funds to achieve that objective.